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The Success and Failure of Oneida Community Architecture

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Architecture is more than the sum of its space plans, façades, and skyline profiles. Buildings communicate the uses for which they were built, the users who commissioned their construction, and the builders who assembled them. We can properly assert that buildings represent human agency; they are a range of social practices arrested in time and place.[1]

Histories of the nineteenth century utopian Oneida Community (hereafter referred to as the Community) eventually reference that commune's massive residential complex, which they sometimes called their Mansion House. However, just as often, those histories gloss that built assemblage, so that it appears as an inevitable, incidental, or "just so" part of a more important hagiography of persons named Noyes.[2] In fact, the Community's Mansion House comprised multiple structures, including four large interconnected structures built as the 1862 Main House, the 1864 Tontine, the 1869 South Wing and the 1878 New House. Three of those structures were primarily residential. The 1864 Tontine building was designed as a workhouse and dining room. It is these four buildings that are the focus of this essay.

This essay proceeds from the assertion that the architecture of the Oneida Community is much more than background. The Community's residential buildings reveal much about their communal experiment and the trans-Atlantic world with which they communicated. What follows probes that assertion by exploring at some depth the material and documentary evidence that remains of buildings and construction.

In The Beginning

In the early evening of Sunday, June 22, 1862, the members of the utopian Community inaugurated their newly completed assembly hall. According to their report in the *Circular*, the members bid adieu to their old parlor and long-time home-center; William Inslee read a prayer, Jonathan Burt spoke briefly, and all joined in singing the Community Hymn. The assembled then formed a procession, led by a brass band, across the lawn and into their newest brick Mansion House. There, in the newly completed Community Hall, several more speeches followed. Erastus Hamilton spoke first.

If we look the world over for the highest development of civilization, I think the statement can be sustained, that it will be found among the people of the Northern States of America.… Individuals are known by their fruits, and so are a people. You trace the growth of any of the towns favorably circumstanced and you will find, first, the church and schoolhouse, taking a marked position. Religion and education lead the people by the hand in the way of prosperity and refinement. Where there is no religion, you will find no education, but corruption and ignorance instead. A religious people are certain to be prosperous.[3]

The Oneida Community used Italianate and Gothic Revival architectural vocabularies to identify as ideologically elite and to differentiate itself from the surrounding society. The 1862 building (center) featured a four-story tower from which to survey the surrounding countryside.
Courtesy of the Oneida Comunity Mansion House

Hamilton's thesis—that properly Christian persons will achieve prosperity—is central to the doctrine of Noyesian Perfectionism. Among Europeans settling the North American frontier, it is not a unique assertion; John Winthrop and other Puritans proposed it two centuries before Hamilton.[4] Importantly for this essay, however, Hamilton's Perfectionist thesis is definitional of his architecture and central to his design aesthetic.

Reading Social Environments

Given that buildings are collaborative efforts, architecture is effective in depicting social beliefs and practices and in recording change through time. Standing structures provide material and semiotic signifiers of the intentions and of successive use by their creators and occupants.

As noted above, the extant Oneida Community Mansion House is actually four of the several structures built for the utopian Community. As such it congeals the nineteenth-century practices and beliefs of its constructors, as well as demonstrating today how those beliefs and practices were transposed by successive generations of users.

Although John Humphrey Noyes had little practically to do with design or construction, his Perfectionist theology features prominently in both. The scion of a well-to-do New England family, young Noyes first espoused his interpretation of the New Testament while a divinity student at Yale, which activity purportedly earned his expulsion. After experimenting with cooperative living in Putney, Vermont, Noyes and his small extended family accepted an invitation from a kindred group of Perfectionists in Oneida, N.Y. [5] The two groups pooled resources, particularly the Jonathan Burt farmstead alongside Oneida Creek. That land came to Burt by purchase from the state of New York; land it had previously expropriated from the Oneida Indians and was using to encourage Euro-American settlement.[6]

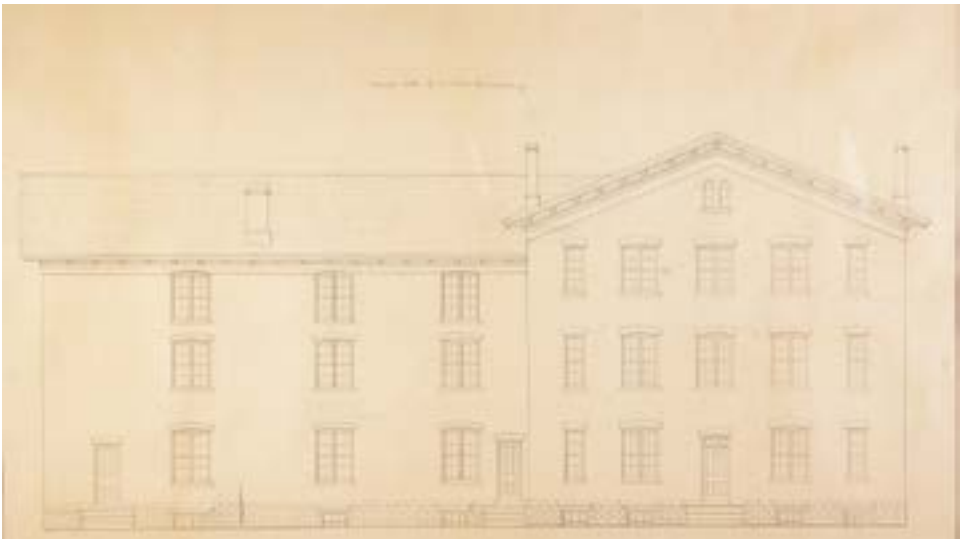
Among the Perfectionists, Noyes was not the only person of standing. The Community shared resources and administered their project through a central committee formed primarily of founding members. Among that leading group was Erastus Hapgood Hamilton.

E. H. Hamilton

Robertson described Hamilton as "an enterprising architect from nearby Syracuse."[7] In a serialized history written by Harriet Worden for the Community's weekly *Circular*—"The Old Log Hut"—Hamilton is remembered as "our chosen captain" in constructing the first Mansion

House. Worden adds, "His Syracuse friends … were by no means joyous over the departure of so promising a citizen. His services there as a practical mechanic—a master builder—were highly appreciated. In the moral and religious fields, too, he was highly appreciated."[8]

Hamilton is often identified in the *Circular* as "architect" and head of the building department, charged with design and construction tasks at Oneida and elsewhere.[9] One genealogist claims that Hamilton attended college in Syracuse.[10] No college is known to have existed in Syracuse in the 1830s or 1840s, but Hamilton may have attended Syracuse Academy, a secondary school founded in 1839. It is doubtful that Hamilton would have been introduced to architecture *per se* in a secondary school, but he would have encountered geometry, trigonometry, and mechanics.[11]



Erastus Hamilton's drawings demonstrate his practical blending of structural engineering with mid-nineteenth century design motifs. Various elements incorporated into the 1862 and 1869 buildings appear to reference pattern books found in the Oneida Community library.
Courtesy of the Oneida Comunity Mansion House

Thus, Hamilton most likely trained himself in building design and construction. It is also safe to say that Hamilton viewed the built environment through the lens of theology. His expositions about the social

ramifications of Christian beliefs receive regular reporting in the *Circular*. Certainly, Hamilton's administrative leadership derived from both his practical ability and his religious ideology. He was named as one of four principals and "attorney-in-fact" for the Community, and charged with supervising a range of activities, in addition to superintending construction of the first timber house in 1848, the first brick house in 1862, and the 1869 South Wing addition. He also directed construction of the 1864 factory at Willow Place, buildings and renovations at the Wallingford Community, and the 1878 addition designed by Lewis W. Leeds. When the Community required funding for its Willow Place factory, Hamilton applied to Gerrit Smith for a loan of "about $25,000." When the Community devolved into a joint-stock corporation in 1880, Hamilton was chosen as its first president. [12]

There are no known notes from Hamilton describing his thought process, but commentaries in the *Oneida Circular* and later in the *American Socialist* provide some insight regarding design and construction. For example, in February 1869, the *Circular* printed a lengthy, unattributed explanation of "The Mansard Roof" followed two weeks later with the note that "E. H. H. is busy on his architectural plans. He has just finished a projection of the new wing we are to build with a Mansard roof." In March of that year the *Circular* solicited for masons to work on the new house, directing applicants to E. H. Hamilton. Six weeks later, the *Circular* reported that "nine masons and a dozen more other workmen are rapidly laying the cellar walls of the wing," and two weeks later "Mr. Hamilton says they are getting along well with work on the new building … he expects to commence laying brick early this week."[13]

But again, Hamilton's practical architecture is equaled in significance by his religious worldview; amply conveyed in his letters to the *Circular* and in transcriptions of weekly meetings. His remarks in dedication of the first brick Mansion House (above) are thereby perhaps his most succinct architectural theory.

Not Hamilton Alone

All Oneida Community activity was a cooperative product. Working with Hamilton in building matters were Abram Burt (eldest son of co-founder Jonathan Burt) and several other members, including Frederick Marks, Henry Thayer, Daniel Knowles, and Albert Kinsley, each of whom also worked as carpenter and/or supervisor. Typically, the *Circular* referred to

most others only by initials, such as "Mr. G," "Mr. H," "Mr. J," or "Mr. K," who all participated in the extended design charrette that produced the first brick Mansion House.[14] However, final design decisions are often credited to Hamilton, or in the case of the first brick mansion house, to Hamilton and J. H. Noyes.[15]

None of the surviving drawings of the 1862 or 1869 building projects are signed or initialed to indicate authorship. Unattributed drawings and accounts in the *Circular* might therefore be the product of someone other than Hamilton. For example, in her diary, Harriet Worden described Abram Burt making design drawings. Apart from what is mentioned in the *Circular*, no other records are known.

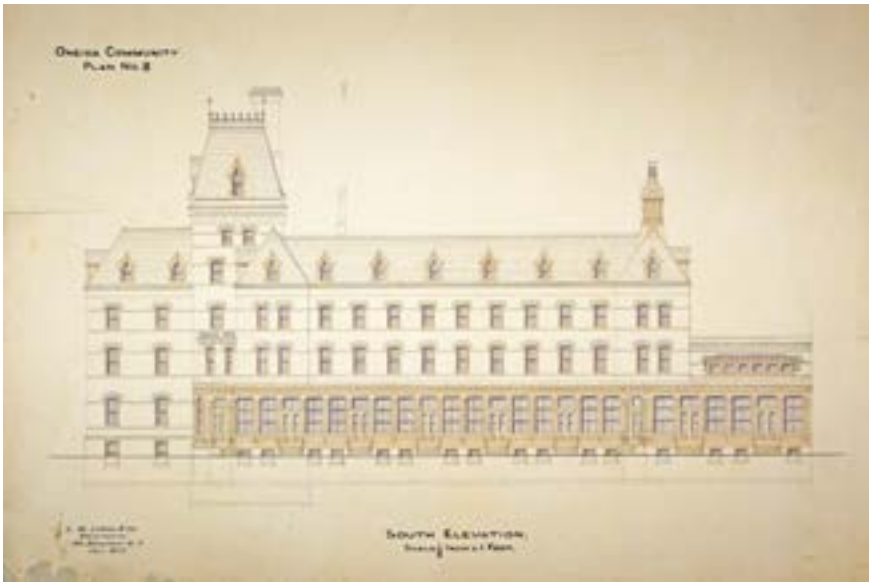
Lewis Leeds

Sometime prior to July 1877, the design firm of Lewis Walker Leeds was hired to plan what would be the last residential structure for the Community. Leeds was a noteworthy choice. His office in New York City was at the center of American architecture. Very nearby on lower Broadway was the office of Calvert Vaux and Frederick C. Withers, with whom Leeds often collaborated. Among his many designs, Vaux is remembered as co-designer, with F. L. Olmsted, of Central Park, and as architect, with Jacob Wray Mould, of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the American Museum of Natural History.

Interestingly, Vaux and Withers met while working in the design firm founded by Andrew Jackson Downing. After Downing's untimely death in 1852, Vaux and Withers continued the practice as their own. A defining feature of their practice was their integration of building and landscape design.

The architectural firm of Vaux, Withers & Co. undertook a variety of large building projects, which often required environmental systems design. Thus, Vaux, Withers, and Leeds collaborated on several large and highly visible projects, including the Hartford (Connecticut) Retreat for the Insane, the Hudson River Hospital for the Insane, and Shepard Asylum in Baltimore. Leeds and Vaux collaborated on other projects as well, including jointly inventing a thermometric regulator for building furnaces.[16]

Leeds's public and professional standing was no doubt improved by his service on the U.S. Sanitary Commission during the Civil War, a government agency led by Frederick Law Olmsted. Vaux, who also partnered with Olmsted, encouraged Leeds's appointment, and during



The 1878 New House designed by the Manhattan firm of L. W. Leeds & Co. proposed a six story tower at its west end and a window-lined gallery along its south face, neither of which were built.
Courtesy of the Oneida Comunity Mansion House

that war Leeds was directly involved in designing army hospitals and curbing the spread of infectious disease. After the war, Leeds was retained by the federal government to re-design environmental systems for the U.S. Capitol building and the U.S. Treasury headquarters. Leeds's portfolio includes other hospitals, schools, and high-capacity buildings.

Leeds published his *Treatise on Ventilation* comprising lectures delivered at the Franklin Institute in Philadelphia (1866–1868), which proved popular enough to merit two editions in ten years. In the *Treatise*, Leeds summarized his hypotheses regarding environmental health and air-borne hazards. Although never a member of the American Institute of Architects, an autobiographical statement appended to his *Treatise* attests that "a large part of my business consists in giving [plans and specifications] only, and in most cases I do not superintend the execution of the work … in many cases the plans are so improved by the owner or architects as to be beyond recognition by their designer, and sometimes so improved as to be thought worthy of an application for a patent."[17]

Only a subset of Leeds's design was built. The original triple-hung sash windows at the first level are evident in this record photograph, as are the ventilation towers rising above the roof.
Courtesy of the Oneida Comunity Mansion House

Leeds's ongoing collaboration with Vaux, Withers & Co. raises the tantalizing question as to whether Vaux and Withers might have been involved in the Oneida Community project. Vaux admitted in an appendix to the second edition of the *Treatise* that he (Vaux) was "in the habit for several years past, of consulting with (Leeds) professionally in regard to the arrangements to be made for heating and ventilation in plans for public and private buildings." In addition, multiple large public buildings designed by Vaux, Withers & Co. during the 1870s, such as the Hudson River State Hospital, employ the Victorian Gothic design vocabulary evident in Leeds's 1878 addition to the Mansion House complex.[18]

Influences

In the absence of explicit documentation, we can surmise Hamilton's design choices by interpreting the built and material culture left by the Community. Apart from the buildings, the largest extant body of Community material is its former library collection. That library, which the *Circular* described as "predominantly British and American ideas … filtered through the

Anglo-Saxon brain," amounted in 1869 to approximately 4,500 volumes, although not all books had been catalogued.[19]

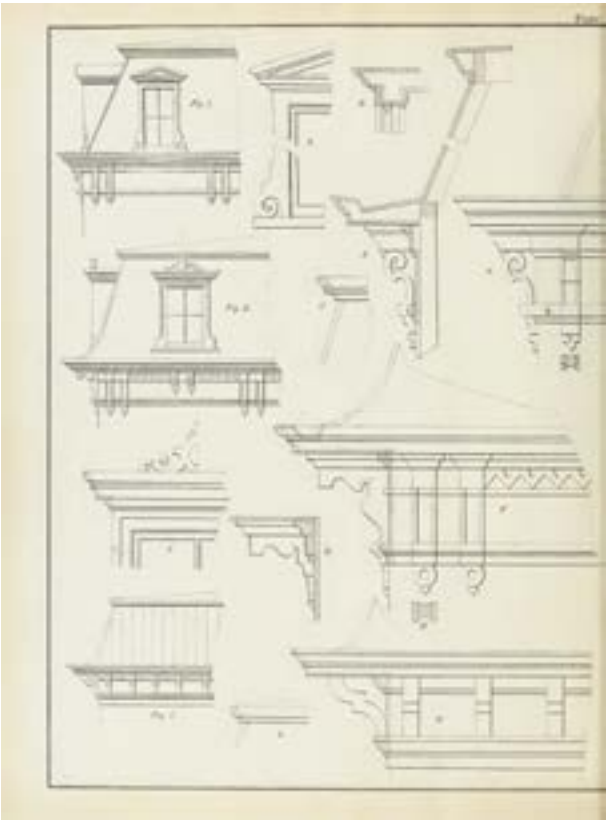
Most of the surviving books were inventoried in 2012 during a project directed by Burke Library at Hamilton College. That inventory lists 3,170 books published before 1880, or about 70 percent of the number described in 1869. These books, now all quite rare and in threatened condition, provide a snapshot of the themes and topics that engaged commune members and framed their considerations of the world beyond Oneida.

Among those influential writings are two books by Andrew Jackson Downing: *Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* (1854) and *Fruit and Fruit Trees of America* (1857). Fred. L. Olmsted is represented with *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States with Remarks on Their Economy* (1861) and *A Journey in the Back County* (1861), reports of travels through the antebellum Southern states. Both Downing and Olmsted were written about in the *Circular*, as were Vaux, Jacob Wray Mould, and George Waring.[20]

Downing's influence is especially evident in the first brick house and its south addition. In his *Treatise*, he writes at length in praise of Italianate residential architecture.

> The modern Italian style recalls images of that land of painters and of the fine arts, where the imagination, the fancy, and taste, still revel in a world of beauty and grace.[21]
>
> Our rural residences, evincing that love of the beautiful and the picturesque, which, combined with solid comfort, is so attractive to the eye of every beholder, will not only become sources of the purest enjoyment to the refined minds of the possessors, but will exert an influence for the improvement in taste of every class in our community. The ambition to build "shingle palaces" in starved and meagre grounds, we are glad to see giving way to that more refined feeling which prefers a neat villa or cottage, tastily constructed, and surrounded by its proper accessories, of greater or less extent, of verdant trees and beautiful shrubbery.[22]

Downing added that the Italianate vocabulary allowed additions to be made in almost any direction without injuring the aesthetic effect of the original structure. He also advocated, as architectural elements, the use of trees, walkways, and exedra such as rustic benches and arbors, similar to built features on the Community's south lawn.[23]



The Model Architect, *a pattern book from the Oneida Community's library, illustrates architectural details similar to those employed in Mansion House buildings.*

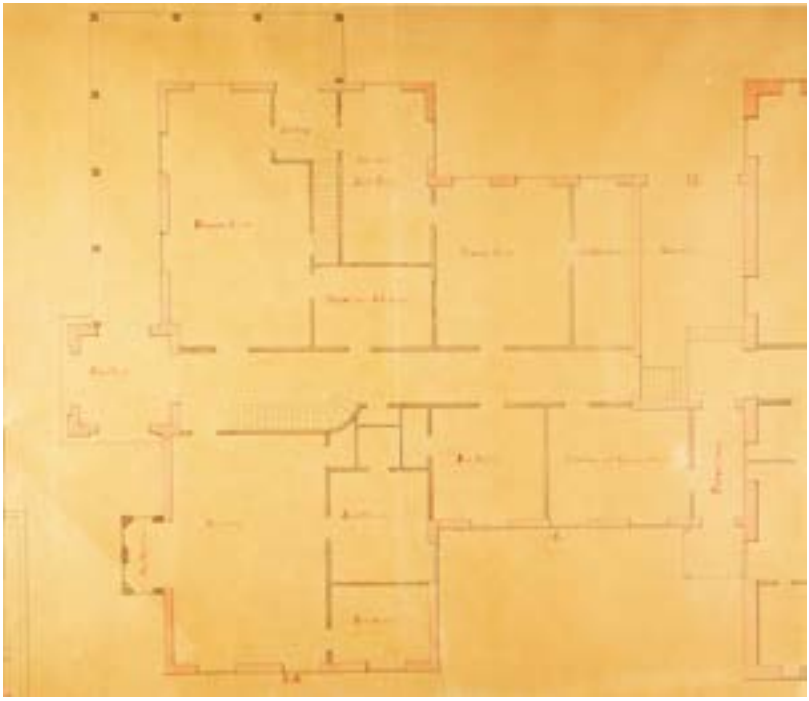
Besides Downing, other library books evince a strong interest in building design, such as *Rural Architecture* (1856), *Architecture Design for Street Fronts, Suburban Homes and Cottages* (1867), and *The Model Architect, a Series of Original Designs* (1852). These practical guides illustrate design features for readers to emulate. Both the 1862 and 1869 Mansion House buildings resemble design suggestions given in *Architecture Design* or *Model Architect*. Also notable are books that indicate Community interest in public health, hygiene, and environmental systems, including *Mental Disorders: Diseases of the Brain and Nerves* (1871), *Notes on Nursing: What it is and What it is Not* (1860), *Hand-Book of Hygienic Practice: Intended as a Practical Guide for the Sick Room* (1865), and *Earth-Closets: How to Make Them and How to Use Them* (1868).[24]

The intersection of public health and building design rose to significance for the Community as their population density grew. Infectious diseases such as dysentery and cholera were epidemic in nineteenth-century America, and the Community, although isolated, was not immune. At least once in his capacity as head of the Community's Building Department, during late 1868 and early 1869, E. H. Hamilton made a field trip through New York and Connecticut to study improvements in building design. Among the sites toured were the "lunatic asylums" in Middletown and Hartford, Connecticut; hospital projects designed by Vaux, Withers & Co. with Lewis Leeds as consulting environmental engineer. Thus, library holdings and Hamilton's excursion suggest a rigorous interest in the relationship of large building design and human health.[25]

The Hudson River State Hospital for the Insane (Poughkeepsie, N.Y.) was designed (1867) by the New York City firm of Vaux, Withers & Co. with Lewis Leeds as consultant, using then-modern Gothic Revival vocabulary. Erastus Hamilton toured this facility during a field trip in early 1869.
Hudson River Psychiatric Center, National Register of Historic Places Collection

Process

Architectural practice in mid-1800s America was of course very different from practice in the twenty-first century, yet some tasks in the process were undoubtedly quite similar. It is unlikely, for example, that an architect would begin a design commission without preliminary conceptual development discussions with his or her client. The design development work and drawings that followed those concept discussions would also emerge through an iterative process, in which the architect proposed alternate solutions and made modifications based on the client's critique. Such a process is described in Harriet Worden's recollection of how the first Mansion House building was developed: "the enthusiasm of the family was soon aroused, and there followed a series of plans and diagrams, some of which were amusingly elaborate."[26]



This space layout for the 1869 South Wing (Children's Wing) demonstrates the workable but under-developed architectural abilities of the Oneida Community's Building Department. This unsigned drawing has been attributed to E. H. Hamilton.
Courtesy of the Oneida Comunity Mansion House

Building improvements were periodically discussed in evening meetings, such as Hamilton's proposal to build earth closet latrines in the south wing. Such discussion was also communicated via the *Circular*, such as creating the museum display in the assembly hall vestibule, building a Mansard-style attic, and the advantages and requirements of central steam heat.[27]

Drawings that survive of the 1862 and 1869 buildings comprise schematic space plans, building exterior elevations, and detail sketches intended to guide carpentry work. Most of these are pencil drawings on inexpensive and irregularly sized paper, using a variety of dimensional scales. These drawings appear to be instructions to carpenters or masons, rather than records of design, and demonstrate a self-taught drawing technique and knowledge of building design—techniques later taught in the Community's workshops.[28]

Drawings that survive from Leeds's office, on the other hand, demonstrate a sophisticated design process. All are of uniform size and scale, numbered, signed, and dated (July 1877). The set depicts a complete concept in plans and elevations. Alternative design proposals from Leeds, if any, are unfortunately unknown. We can assume from their library and from the *Circular* that the Community knew of both Vaux and Leeds and that introductory communications about the new wing began at least months before 1877. The surviving design drawings—highly finished pen and watercolor plans and elevations—also represent considerable skill and preparation time. All of this evidence suggests that Leeds was hired during or before 1876. However, the *American Socialist*—which succeeded the *Circular* in the late 1870s—is largely quiet about the plan for that last New House and published very little commentary about it in the period before its construction.

Masonry

The design success of a masonry structure depends upon material and workmanship; that is certainly true of the Mansion House buildings. Having no resident expertise with brick or stone, the Community relied upon contracted masons, supervised by Hamilton and Albert Kinsley. The masons recruited for the South Wing were reportedly paid four or five dollars per day, which was six to eight times the rate paid to workers in their silk factory. The wage rates indicate the scarcity of skilled masons as well as how the Community valued the factory women.[29]

Bricks were manufactured on site using local materials and laid by a crew of as many as nine tradesmen. The speed with which these masons worked is reported in the weekly *Circular*. By those accounts the crew worked well and kept to schedule.[30]

The building walls are constructed with an interior cavity, insulating the interior from the exterior face and thereby mitigating condensation and heat transfer. The resulting walls provided especially strong load-bearing capacity but also required substantial foundations to support the great weight. Reportedly, the masons who built the South Wing noted the degree to which the 1862 tower had settled, and constructed much more substantial footings for 1869 tower.[31]

Notably, the brickwork throughout the four structures is not of a single, uniform bond pattern. Furthermore, in three of the four structures, the brickwork bond technique changes within elevations and from one elevation to the next. The walls of the 1862 House and the 1869 South Wing were built using a Monk Bond technique, interspersed with sections that are laid with a Stretcher Bond. Complicating the brickwork further are other sections that are built with an English Bond pattern. With the exception of the 1878 addition, in which a Common Bond is used throughout, none of the brickwork is consistent throughout the building's envelope.

This variegation suggests either that, a) neither Hamilton nor Kinsley specified a coherent plan for brickwork, or else failed to supervise such a plan, or b) the masons were not sufficiently skilled to use a consistent bricklaying technique throughout the structures. In either case, the resulting patchwork detracts from the overall effect of the design. It also informs our interpretation of the choices made. Monk Bond and English Bond are "Old World" techniques,[32] but from that it cannot necessarily be assumed that the masons were familiar with such techniques. Subsequent repairs in the twentieth century have further disrupted the original alignment of stretchers and headers, particularly areas that were re-pointed with Portland cement and which further damaged the brickwork. The lack of attention to brickwork detail contrasts with the cut stone quoins, sills, and lintels, and with the decorative brickwork employed elsewhere in the 1862 and 1869 buildings. Many of these details are specified in working drawings for the buildings, and some appear to be copied from one of the pattern books in the Community library.[33]

Masons were hired to build all of the Mansion House buildings under the primary supervision of Albert Kinsley and Erastus Hamilton. The brickwork employs a variety of techniques, including the Monk Bond pattern evident in this elevation of the 1862 building.
Photograph by author

The Leeds-designed New House employed a consistent Common Bond brick pattern throughout, which helpfully offset the polychromatic banding at sills and lintels.
Photograph by author

The 1864 Tontine building was planned as a utilitarian structure and so lacks the ornamental stonework of the main house. Its window apertures are lintelled with brick arches. Variegated brickwork on the Tontine is also explained by the fact that the existing structure was created in three separate phases, and therefore at least three groups of masons, between 1863 and its last modification in 1912.

The 1878 New House is built using a Common or American Bond pattern: seven rows of staggered stretchers separated by a single row of headers. This New House also employs elaborate polychromatic brickwork in horizontal bands at each floor plate, at the roofline, and surrounding the windows and doors. The roof of the New House, as in the 1869 South Tower, is further ornamented with green and grey slate shingles set in geometric patterns.

An Evolving Utopian Grammar

The Main house, the Tontine, and the South Wing employ an Italianate design vocabulary, which was considered to be an elite aesthetic in the mid-nineteenth century and associated by Downing and others with Classicism in the visual arts. The style references Renaissance urbanity and status relationships, and a mark of prestige for those who employed it in their homes. London architect John Nash promoted the style in the grand villas built as part of his Regent's Park project (1811–1827); it was also advocated by the British landscape designer Capability Brown.

Nonetheless, these design decisions were apparently neither simple nor direct. Reflecting on the process several years later, Hamilton wrote:

> When we built our new house, how many were the different minds about material, location and plan! How were our feelings wrought up! Party-spirit ran high. There was the stone party, the brick party, and the concrete wall party. Yet by patience, forbearing one with the other and submitting one to another, the final result satisfied every one. Unity is the essential thing. Secure that and financial success and all other good things will follow.[34]

All of which raises interesting questions about the Community's decision to build their last residential addition. That New House, designed by Leeds, presents a radical departure from the earlier vocabulary, in favor of a contemporized Gothic Revival style, later known as Victorian Gothic. This revised Gothicism responds to new technologies of the period: coal,

oil, steel, machine power, engineered buildings, and modern cities.

For Downing, Gothic architecture was "rich in picturesque beauty, and harmonious in connexion with the surrounding forms of vegetation."

> The ideas connected in our minds with Gothic architecture are of a highly romantic and poetical nature contrasted with the classical associations which the Greek and Roman styles suggest. Although our own country is nearly destitute of ruins and ancient timeworn edifices, yet the literature of Europe, and particularly of what we term the mother country, is so much our own, that we form a kind of delightful ideal acquaintance with the venerable castles, abbeys, and strongholds of the middle ages. Romantic as is the real history of those times and places, to our minds their charm is greatly enhanced by distance, by the poetry of legendary superstition, and the fascination of fictitious narrative.[35]

Within its own fanciful narrative, the Community's site plan conforms to a baronial grammar, through which Perfection rises above the landscape to oppose the surrounding Mammon. The Italianate and Gothic motifs merged to form a less centered, if not fully decentered, campus.

The last New House addition resembles two close contemporary building types—the public hospital and the asylum—both studied by Hamilton, et al. Importantly, those design choices are outward facing as well as inwardly definitional; reflecting the Community's embrace of the contemporary world, even as they professed alternatives based upon their special Christian theology. The Community's embrace of and dependency upon interaction with the non-Perfectionist world had, by the 1860s, come to define most of their behavior. They admitted that early efforts at self-sufficiency were abandoned in favor of lucrative commerce with non-believers.[36]

When in June 1862 they dedicated their first brick Mansion House building, they sang:

> We will build us a dome
> On our beautiful plantation,
> And we'll all have one home,
> And one family relation;
> We'll battle with the wiles
> Of the dark world of Mammon,
> And return with its spoils

To the home of our dear ones.[37]

That outward attention situated them securely within the trans-Atlantic world. They traded with European merchants for raw Chinese silk, bought steel from British mills, sold animal traps to Canadian and Russian fur trappers, displayed their manufactures in the 1866 Paris Exposition, and were otherwise wholly dependent upon global market forces for their communal prosperity. It is therefore quite logical that their intellectual and aesthetic choices would be influenced by and selected to validate their social status.

Essays in the *Circular* repeatedly described Community leaders' Anglo-Saxon heritage and New English ancestry, and boasted of their Yankee ingenuity.[38] Some members also wrote with curious but patronizing interest about those whose ancestry was not English but rather Chinese, Irish, Indian, Native America, or African.[39]

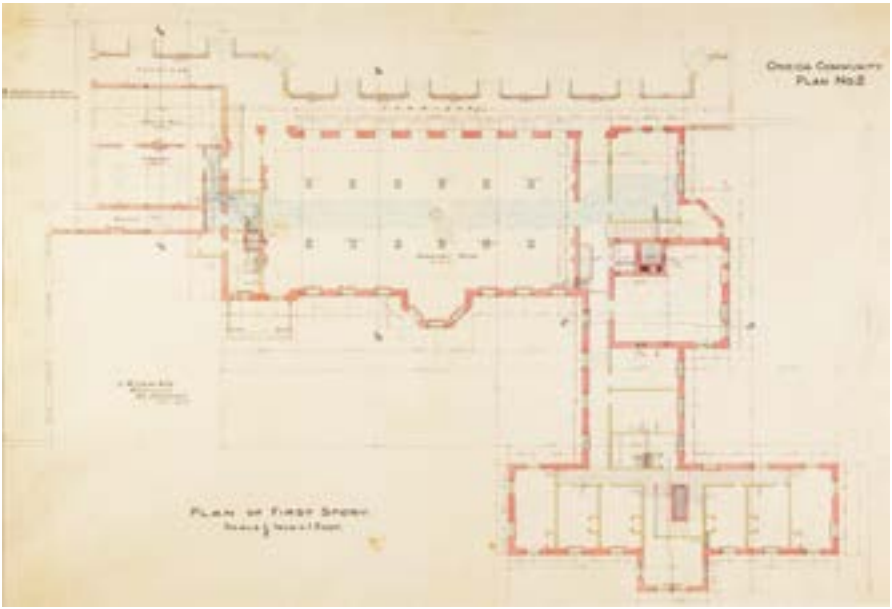
The earlier design choices by the Community may have expressed latent admiration for the Renaissance. More certainly, their explicit claim to the "spoils of Mammon" suggests an aesthetic of social status. Prosperous merchants, landowners, and industrialists of mid-century central New York frequently vaunted their wealth by way of well-detailed Italianate homes. Several Italianate homes were built in the 1840s, 1850s, and 1860s, along Main Street and along Seneca Avenue in the nearby Town of Lenox.[40]

Unfinished Business

The 1878 building concept by Leeds describes an expansive addition to the client's 1862 building. It included a much larger library, a four-story block of approximately sixty bedrooms, men's and women's baths and water closets on each floor, a six-story tower at the west end, with an additional four story block to its north with perhaps another twenty-four bedrooms and multiple communal parlors.

A grand windowed gallery lined with thirteen-foot high windows was to extend along the south courtyard side of this New House, connecting the library at one end with the Tontine at the other. The basement would contain a new dining room.

In addition to greatly improved indoor plumbing, this New House would be heated by an innovative low-pressure steam system, feeding compact cast-iron radiators—a major improvement over the existing system with its seven thousand linear feet of iron pipe. Leeds's ergonomic



This plan for the 1878 addition shows an extensive project, including a western tower with elevator, indoor water closets and bathrooms, and a south-facing gallery that joined two large residential blocks.
Courtesy of the Oneida Comunity Mansion House

design centered on his hypotheses regarding building environments, and particularly the importance of replacing the various aerosols exhausted by human respiration with abundant fresh air. He also advocated zoned heating, directing warmth to the lower elevation of a room and cooling the elevations nearest to occupants' heads. (In the library, a radiator is recessed into the floor.) The main volume of this New House is designed with 13½ foot storeys, with each floor fitted with "ventiducts" that pulled air out and up through flues that rise above the roofline. Its north and south walls are lined with double- and triple-hung sash windows, nine and twelve feet high.

Only a subset of Leeds's concept was built—the central four-story volume and the single-story library addition—and those sections were not fully completed. The first floor of the main volume remained a large open space, and was sub-divided only after the Community devolved in 1881. The courtyard gallery, six-story tower, and western addition were not built, although some foundations were laid and later adapted to support a one-story addition built in 1914.

The 1878 addition adjoined the rear of the 1862 building, but was not completed as designed.
Courtesy of the Oneida Comunity Mansion House

Externalities

As the century of industrial imperialism pressed on, the Community attempted to keep pace with the large-scale changes and innovations that surrounded them. The U.S. Civil War; wars in Europe; ongoing colonization of North America, Africa and Asia; repeated economic panics and depressions; and technical changes in machine power, transport, electricity, chemistry, and medicine, were all factors that continually re-fashioned cultural norms in America and throughout the trans-Atlantic world. Even as the Community attempted to accommodate, if not embrace, many of those changes, its ideological and political coherence remained grounded in less complex social relationships. Social tensions within and external to the Community repeatedly combined to undermine its efforts and claims to excellence.

For the period beginning in late 1872 and continuing into the 1880s, the U.S. and Europe were plagued by deep economic depression. Frequent and numerous bank and business failures had cascading effects; commerce across many sectors slowed dramatically. Community reliance upon exchange with the non-Perfectionist world undermined their economic and

political autonomy as well as their ideological cohesion. Several scholars have examined the socio-theological and intergenerational contests that buffeted the Community during those years.[41] Older commune members advocated a return to earlier practices while younger members rejected Noyesian theology in favor of newer—if not less theistic—trends in philosophy, science, and psychology. Given its claims to pragmatic "Yankee ingenuity," the real decline in fortunes—in small-scale manufacturing, in the fur trade, and in the silk thread business—undermined the Community's strategies and leadership.

One of the grandest examples of that decline is the 1878 New House itself. Begun in the trough of an unprecedented economic depression, the Community soon found itself constrained by that decline. Unanticipated stockpiles of unsold traps and thread further depressed prices and throttled production.[42] They moved to reduce costs in various areas, which soon enough meant cutting back on their building plan as well. Contra the prediction of their Community Hymn, the Oneida Community could not reap Mammon's spoils indefinitely but instead fell victim to its anarchy.

Thus, an experiment in cooperative labor and communal property relations gradually metamorphosed into simple commodity exchange, praising "God as the great employer … the great capitalist who dispenses profitable jobs." A community that was founded on the premise of gender equality became increasingly dependent on profits gained by low-waged employment of dozens of young women in its silk factory. Commune members ultimately traded egalitarianism for shares of common stock.[43]

Conclusion

The surviving Mansion House presents us with four brick residential buildings that are monumental both in size and as commemorative edifices. They signify an optimism born of the mid-nineteenth-century cooperative imagination—experiments in autonomy that required ideological and behavioral cohesion, even as those same practices were being disassembled and atomized in the surrounding world.

The concurrent attention and inattention of that surrounding world has thus far enabled these buildings to survive, although given the disintegrating brickwork and leaking roofs for how much longer is seriously in question. But while they remain, we can explore the public history embedded in their masonry.

Notes

1. For example, Tim Ingold, "The Temporality of the Landscape," *World Archaeology* 25, no. 2 (1993): 152-74; H. M. Van Wormer, "The Ties That Bind: Ideology, Material Culture, and the Utopian Ideal," *Historical Archaeology* 40, no. 1 (2006): 37-56; J. R. White, "Designed for Perfection: Intersections between Architecture and Social Program at the Oneida Community," *Utopian Studies* 7, no. 2 (1996): 113-38.
2. Cf. P. B. Noyes, *A Goodly Heritage* (New York: Rinehart & Co., 1958); Constance Noyes Robertson, *Oneida Community* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1981); Chris Jennings, *Paradise Now: The Story of American Utopianism* (New York: Random House, 2016); Spencer Klaw, *Without Sin: The Life and Death of a Utopian Community* (New York: Viking, 1993); Ellen Wayland-Smith, *Oneida: From Free Love Utopia to the Well-set Table* (New York: Picador, 2016).
3. "Opening of Community Hall," *Circular*, June 26, 1862, 79-81.
4. John Winthrop, *Generall Considerations for the Plantation in New England, with an Answer to Several Objections,* Papers of the Winthrop Family, vol. 2. (1629). Accessed at http://www.masshist.org/publications/winthrop/index.php/view/PWF02d073. The converse of Hamilton's thesis is that those who are not rich must be morally deficient.
5. The adult members from Putney, Vermont, were John Humphrey Noyes, Harriet Holton Noyes, George Cragin, and Mary Cragin. The adult members of the Oneida group comprised Jonathan Burt, Lorinda Lee Burt, Horace Burt, Daniel Nash, Sophia Nash, Joseph Ackley, Hail Waters, and William Hatch.
6. J. Campisi, "New York-Oneida Treaty of 1795: A Finding of Fact," *American Indian Law Review* 4, no. 1 (1976): 71-82.
7. Robertson, *Oneida Community*, 48.
8. "The Old Log Hut," *Circular*, November 30, 1868, 295.
9. "Community Journal," *Circular*, July 26, 1869, 148; "Community Journal," *Circular*, April 22, 1872, 133; "Community Journal," *Circular*, July 21, 1873, 237.
10. John B. Teeple, *The Oneida Family: Genealogy of a 19th Century Perfectionist Commune* (Oneida, N.Y.: Oneida Community Historical Committee, 1985), 14.
11. Charles F. Wheelock, *Secondary Education Report for the School Year Ending July 31, 1918* (Albany, N.Y.: University of the State of New York, 1922), 125-30; Dwight Bruce, *Onondaga's Centennial: Gleanings of a Century* (Boston: Boston History Company, 1896), 1:321, 547-48. Bruce sets the existence of Academy as 1835 until 1846.
12. "Scraps and Talks," *Circular*, December 28, 1868, 322; E. H. Hamilton,

Letter to Gerrit Smith, February 23, 1865. Syracuse University Special Collections; W. A. Hinds, *American Communities and Co-operative Colonies* (Chicago: Charles Kerr, 1908*)*, 219; Charles A. Burt v. Oneida Community Limited, et al. February 14, 1889. Supreme Court of the State of New York – Madison County, Fifth Judicial Circuit 1889, 80, 121, 133, 135, 140. The named principals of the Oneida Community were John H. Noyes, Erastus H. Hamilton, William H. Woolworth, and Charles O. Kellogg.

13. "The Mansard Roof," *Circular,* February 22, 1869, 391-92; "Community Journal," *Circular*, March 1, 1869, 397; "Brick Masons Wanted!" *Circular*, March 29, 1869, 16; "Community Journal," *Circular*, May 17, 1869, 72; "Community Journal," *Circular*, May 31, 1869, 87.
14. Harriet M. Worden, "Old Mansion-House Memories," *Circular*, March 18, 1872, 91.
15. "An Oneida Journal," *Circular*, September 5, 1861, 123; "Community Journal," *Circular*, July 26, 1869, 148.
16. Louis W. Leeds, *Treatise on Ventilation: Comprising Seven Lectures Delivered before the Franklin Institute, Philadelphia, 1866-68* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1876), 214-17; L. Leeds and C. Vaux. "Thermometric Regulator for Heating Apparatus." Patent 25,514. September 20, 1859. Washington, DC: USPO, 1959.
17. Nancy Hadley, AIA, email message to author, August 14, 2017; Leeds, *Treatise*, 213.
18. Leeds, *Treatise*, 217; NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission, "Upper West Side / Central Park West Historic District Designation Report." M. Pearson & E. Urbanelli (eds). (New York: NYC LPC, 1990), A156.
19. A. B. "Our Books," *Circular*, February 8, 1869, 375. "A. B." is probably Alfred Barron, but might refer to Ann Bailey. Both Barron and Bailey were teachers in the children's department during the 1860s.
20. B. Bristol, "Pruning," *Circular*, March 4, 1872, 75; C. E., "About Pears," *Circular*, December 16, 1872, 407; G. E. C., "The Wallingford Dam," *Circular*, January 13, 1873, 22; M. L. B., "Central Park," *Circular*, October 13, 1873, 331. "C. E." is probably Charles Ellis; "G. E. C." is probably George E. Cragin; "M. L. B." is possibly Morgan Bloom.
21. Andrew Jackson Downing, *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* (New York, A. O. Moore, 1859), 337.
22. Ibid., 362.
23. Ibid., 336, 394-97.
24. L. F. Allen, *Rural Architecture, Being a Complete Description of Farm Houses, Cottages, and Out Buildings* (New York: A. O. Moore, 1856); M. F. Cummings and C. C. Miller, *Architecture Design for Street Fronts, Suburban Homes and Cottages* (Troy, N.Y.: Bicknell, 1867); S. Sloan, *The Model Architect, a Series of Original Designs* (Philadelphia: E. S. Jones, 1852); Andrew Jackson Davis, *Mental*

Disorders, or, Diseases of the Brain and Nerves (Boston: W. White, 1871); Florence Nightingale, *Notes on Nursing: What It Is, and What It Is Not* (New York: Appleton & Co., 1860); R. T. Trall, *Hand-book for Hygienic Practice: Intended as a Practical Guide for the Sick-room* (New York: Miller & Wood, 1865); George E. Waring, *Earth-closets: How to Make Them and How to Use Them* (New York: Tribune Association, 1868).

25. "Community Journal,"*Circular*, January 25, 1869, 358; "Community Journal," *Circular*, February 8, 1869, 374.
26. Worden, "Old Mansion-House Memories," 90-91.
27. "Community Journal," *Circular*, March 8, 1869, 406; "Community Journal," *Circular*, February 22, 1869, 390; "The Mansard Roof," 391-92; "Community Journal," *Circular*, August 30, 1869, 188.
28. "Community Journal," *Circular*, February 22, 1869, 390.
29. "Manufactories," *Circular*, April 19, 1869, 38-39; "Women's Work and Wages," *Circular*, April 20, 1869, 38-39; "Financial Report for 1868," *Circular*, January 11, 1869, 341-43.
30. "Community Journal," *Circular*, December 27, 1869, 325.
31. "An Oneida Journal," *Circular*, September 4, 1862, 123; "Community Journal," Circular, May 17, 1869, 72. Material evidence of cavity construction is demonstrated by the degradation during the twentieth century of brickwork, subsequently allowing inhabitation by bee colonies and small mammals.
32. E. Orsel, "Brickwork in Leiden: A Survey of Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century Characteristics," in M. Dunkeld, J. Campbell, H. Louw, B. Addis, R. Thorne, eds., *Proceedings of the Second International Congress on Construction History*, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Queens College, Cambridge University, 2006), 2383-86.
33. Cummings and Miller, *Architecture Design*, plates 12, 28, and 50. The original mortar was lime putty. Portland cement is harder and denser than lime and tends to expand as it cures, all of which can cause damage to the surrounding brick.
34. E. H. Hamilton, "Why the North American Phalanx Failed," *Circular*, June 21, 1869, 110.
35. Downing, *Treatise*, 351.
36. "Answers to Correspondents," *Circular*, July 8, 1872, 224.
37. "Opening of Community Hall," *Circular*, June 26, 1862, 77.
38. "Where to Find One's Cousins," *Circular*, March 7, 1870, 402; T. L. P., "New England Village Life, *Circular*, March 7, 1870, 407; Charles A. Cragin, "Can I Obtain a Patent?" *Circular*, April 6, 1868, 20.
39. "Community Journal," *Circular*, August 23, 1869, 180; "The Dominant Language, VI," *Circular*, July 19, 1869, 139-40; "Our Wallingford Letter," *Circular*, July 19, 1869, 143; "English Perversions," February 8, 1869, 371-

372; "The Dominant Language VII," Circular 26 July 1869, 147.

40. Examples: 432 Main Street, Oneida, N.Y. [ca. 1840]; 410 Main Street, Oneida, N.Y. [ca. 1866]; 50 Seneca Avenue, Oneida Castle, N.Y. [ca. 1850]; 426 Broad Street, Oneida, N.Y. [1865].
41. For example, Jennings, *Paradise Now*; Klaw, *Without Sin*; Wayland-Smith, *Oneida.*
42. H. G. Allen, "Statistics for a Single Department," *America Socialist*, March 1, 1879, 7; "Community Items," *American Socialist*, April 24, 1879, 133.
43. George Washington Noyes, "Government Jobs," *Circular*, July 29, 1872, 242; "The Oneida Community," *Waterford Daily Times*, January 12, 1881.